

Unit 4a: Foundational Beliefs--Judaism

Objectives

At the end of this unit you will

Be aware of the following

- Key historical figures in Jewish belief
- Theological significance of present day Israel
- Major movements within Judaism in the United States
- Tendency of many Russian Jewish religious adherents to follow a school of thought within orthodox movements
- Modern/centrist and traditional/rightist schools of orthodox practice
- Nature of covenant within Jewish theology

Identify

- Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael
- Monotheism
- Moses, Exodus, David
- Promised Land, Canaan
- Diaspora, Holocaust, Covenant
- Rabbi, Reform Judaism
- Reconstructionism, Conservative Judaism
- Orthodox Judaism, Hasidim, Kabala
- Torah

Realize

- Theological challenge of the Holocaust to Jewish, Christian and secular ethicists
- Primacy of the Hebrew language in Jewish belief
- View toward the afterlife according to various Jewish schools of thought
- Common misunderstandings concerning Judaism

Unit 4a: Foundational Beliefs--Judaism

"Russia is a multi-national and multi-ethnic state with over 100 nationalities, 21 republics and 18 autonomous regions. Covering 6.6 million square miles, Russia has a population of 150 million, including approximately 635,000 Jewish peoples, the third largest Jewish population in the world."

-- Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, 1 Jan 1998

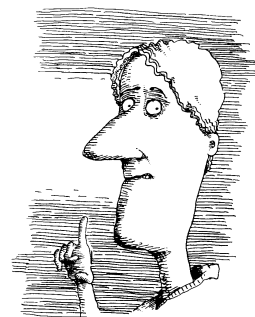
Before discussing the Jewish and Russian Orthodox faith traditions, mention of three principles, each essential to our overall understanding of world cultures and religions, is necessary. Religious belief and practice in Russia amply demonstrates the importance of each.

1. Old Religions Die Hard If confused concerning present cultural-political-religious issues, look to the past. Nothing hangs on as long or as powerfully as religious traditions. Understanding the past is important to understanding the present.

2. Religious Traditions Become Blended Over Time In the process of forced conversions, arbitrary boundary shifts, intermarriages and passage of time, adaptation occurs. Religions blend. In Russia, this effect is especially seen in Uniate, Muslim and "folk level" Eastern Orthodox practice.

3. Faith is Never Pure...The Effect of Culture Must be Added

Economic, political, nationalist, environmental and ethnic composition factors strongly influence the flavor of a religious tradition and expression.



I. Judaism

"Under perestroika, synagogues now can be opened without restrictions, religious literature can be published, and children can be taught Yiddish and receive religious upbringing."

-- Igor Troyanovsky, Religion in the Soviet Republics, p. 185

Judaism possesses a history going back over forty centuries. As the oldest of the religions of the book, it is the cradle, the forerunner from which Christianity and Islam began.

1. Important Persons Key figures and places of Jewish belief (and subsequently for Russian Orthodox and Muslim faith) include:

a. Abraham This patriarchal figure is the father of the Jewish faith, the champion of monotheism (belief in one god), and the one with whom God made a special covenant (contractual agreement).



Born in **Ur of the Chaldees** (near present day An Nasiriyah, Iraq), Abraham migrated to Palestine, traveling within the **Fertile Crescent** (rich farming area located on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, shaped like a half circle) with stops near Babylon, Harran (near Urfa [Edessa], Turkey), Aleppo and Hamath (Halab and Hamah, Syria), and Shechem (Khirbat Balatah, Israel). Due to famine in the land of **Canaan** (present day Palestine), Abraham also traveled to Egypt seeking food.

b. Isaac As part of the covenantal agreement, God promised Abraham and his wife Sarah a son. Their ancestry would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. They would live in their own land--Palestine. When

Sarah seemed unable to have children, Abraham followed the custom of the day in taking a servant woman to bear him children. The servant woman Hagar bore a son Ishmael, much to the displeasure of Sarah. Eventually Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

c. Jacob This son of Isaac experienced a name change to Israel. The descendants of Abraham took on the name Israelites since Jacob's time.

d. Moses The Israelites traveled to Egypt to escape famine (Jacob's son Joseph being a key figure in their survival). Eventually, these Jewish descendants became slaves in Egypt.

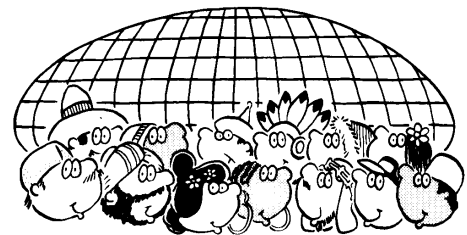
Moses, active some four hundred years after Jacob, led the children of Israel out of Egypt (the Exodus). While wandering through the Sinai Peninsula, God gave Moses the ten commandments near Mt. Sinai (close to present day Gebel Musa, Sinai Peninsula).

e. David This king of Israel (northern Palestine) and Judea (southern Palestine) was founder of the royal Davidic dynasty. King David wrote many of the Old Testament Psalms, led conquests over the Canaanites, and is a leading figure in Jewish history. Jerusalem, the city of David, became capital of the nation of Israel during David's reign.

2. Historical Theology

a. The Promised Land God promised Abraham and his descendants the Promised Land, what is currently the area known as Israel. Though dates vary, the Israelites took possession of this region around 1200 B.C.

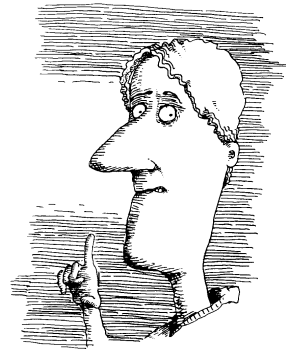
b. The Diaspora (di-AS-pahr-ah) The Romans, in A.D. 70, devastated Jerusalem and the temple. In the process, Jewish people were driven from the land, beginning a time known as the Diaspora.



Without a homeland, Jewish people settled in regions surrounding the Mediterranean and to the east of Palestine.

c. The Holocaust (HOL-ah-kohst) This term described the death of an estimated six million Jewish people, plus assorted other peoples, by the Nazis between 1933-1945. The derivation of this word comes from the Greek rendering "holocauston," itself a rendering of the Hebrew "olah" for sacrifice or whole burnt offering. Lingering effects of this tragedy continue to challenge Jewish and Christian theologians, as well as secular ethicists.

d. Israel In 1948, the modern Jewish state Israel was founded. Current Jewish liturgy includes reference to the nation of Israel, the "land that shall be your possession before the Lord" (Numbers 32:22).



II. Practice

1. Leadership Originally, priests and prophets officiated at the Jerusalem temple and within the northern and southern kingdoms. After the temple's destruction in A.D. 70, rabbis (RAB-i) or teachers and scholars, became the intellectual and spiritual leaders of the Jewish community. Today, outside of Orthodox Judaism movements, both men and women serve as rabbis.

2. Language Hebrew is the primary liturgical language of Judaism. From roughly 400 B.C. to 1881, it was a literary language of religious, liturgical and official use. In biblical times and since 1881 it has functioned as a spoken language of everyday usage. 1881 is the date for the Jewish revival movement in pre-state Palestine.

3. Movements Within the United States there are the following four major Jewish religious movements. As there is considerable dialogue--through literature and other means--between Russian Jewish peoples and those in the United States, Canada and Israel, acquaintance with these religious movements is helpful. Many of the practicing Russian Jewish people follow orthodox practice.

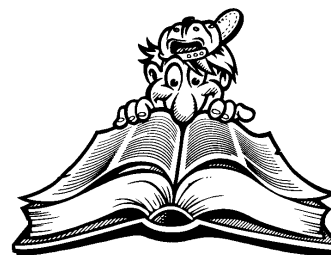


a. Reform Judaism At the liberal end of the Jewish schools of thought, Reform Judaism sees God's relationship with the Jewish peoples as an ongoing process throughout history.

The divinely inspired Torah, while open to individual interpretation, is the foundation of religious practice. The biblical prophets present ethical and moral themes applicable to a just society today. Reform Judaism began in 19th century Germany.

b. Reconstructionism This most recent of the Jewish movements (1930s) embodies an entire civilization rather than just one religion. Judaism as an evolving religious civilization (with corporate beliefs, actions and institutions) is the main concept. A core community "reconstructs" the contents of its civilization from generation to generation.

c. Conservative Reacting to perceived radicalism in the Reformist school, conservatism teaches that the Torah is binding. Much of Jewish law remains authoritative, though new thought and practice influences current belief and ritual.



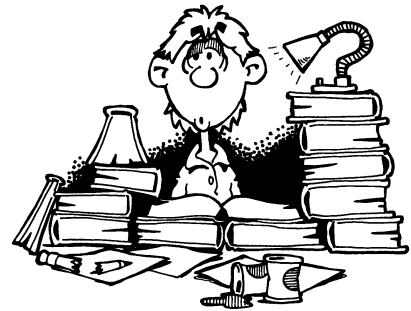
d. Orthodox Growing out of secular and reformist threats, orthodoxy defines itself as a response, in opposition to non-orthodox movements, and as a relationship to ancient Jewish tradition.

Originally conformity to Jewish law--the practice of Judaism--was the defining criteria. Over time, theological responses--right doctrine--also became important. Orthodoxy understands that at Mount Sinai Moses received the divinely revealed Torah.

The process of interpreting the Torah, called Halachah (hah-lah-KHAH), is guided by God and thus authoritative.

Within orthodoxy there are a variety of social and intellectual trends. The two most commonly identified practices are the modern/centrist and the traditional/rightist schools of thought.

(1) Modern Modern orthodoxy seeks loyalty and faithfulness to the Torah, as embodied in the Halachah, yet maintains an active involvement in modern society. Education, both secular and religious, enhances and deepens the quality and substance of Jewish life.



(2) Traditional Withdrawal and separatism are the hallmarks of traditional orthodox schools.

The Hasidim (hah-SID-im), a movement established in Poland in the 18th century, exemplifies this school of thought. Distinctive dress and language styles become religious imperatives.

Secular education, other than career or profession necessity, is of no value. True Torah scholars of every generation discern truth for thought and practice from the canonized texts. A "closed" Jewish society evolves, based upon such interpretation. Limited contact with the larger world occurs.

4. Kabala (KAB-ah-lah) Rabbis developed this distinct branch of Jewish mysticism from the 7th to 18th centuries, with peak interest forming A.D. 1100-1300. Kabala interprets the Scriptures in an esoteric manner, and seeks penetration of divine mysteries. Intense meditation and preparatory rites lead faithful adherents to experience, in some manner, a mystical union with God.



III. Jewish Belief



1. Foundational Understandings

a. Monotheism The Shema (shuh-MAH), "Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is One," summarizes the most fundamental characteristic of God. The Torah (law) expresses God's concern for all.

b. Covenant

The agreement God made with Abraham established Abraham's descendants as the chosen people.

"Judaism has a 3000-year-old tradition of infusing the spiritual into our everyday lives, not for personal redemption, but to uplift the lot of [humankind] through adherence to ethical and moral principles, and to preserve through this common endeavor a sense of connectedness with a people. This, the essence of our Covenant, gives us tools to deal with the disparate and often confusing aspects of modern life."

-- Alfred Moses, U.S. Ambassador to Romania
(as quoted in the American Jewish Committee advertisement, New York Times, 8 Sep 1996, p. E-18)

c. Torah Originally referring to the Pentateuch or five books of Moses, the term gradually included the whole of the Hebrew scriptures. By the end of the fifth and sixth centuries, the Torah became synonymous with anything which is authoritative as God's will for Israel.

Supplements to the Torah are oral traditions Mishnah (meesh-NAH) and the Talmud (tahl-MOOD), and interpretations of the scriptures, the Midrash (mee-DRAHSH). Torah thus encompasses particular rituals, universal ethical statutes, and ultimately includes knowledge of redemption/salvation.

d. Land God's eternal covenant made with Abraham spoke to the significance of the promised land of Palestine.

"The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." (Genesis 17:8.)



Many Jewish people closely identify with Jerusalem and the present day land of Israel, attesting to the enduring importance of this country to their thought and practice.

e. Community A cornerstone of faith is the sense of solidarity felt with others. Jewish peoples worship first and primarily as the people of Israel. Identification with and responsibility for Jewish peoples throughout the world is uppermost. Righteousness however, is not seen to be limited only to those of Jewish faith.

f. Afterlife

(1) Reform In reform trends of thought, every soul eventually returns to God. Memories of the deceased, by those who knew and loved them, provide the basis for true immortality.

(2) Reconstructionist Reconstructionists see the soul as reuniting with the universe upon death.

(3) Conservative This movement discusses the resurrection of the dead, yet does not specify what form such resurrection takes. The Messiah's return could inaugurate a physical rebirth. A spiritual resurrection occurs in remembering the one deceased.

(4) Orthodox A bodily resurrection and physical afterlife are the beliefs of this school. The coming of the Messiah commences these events. Until the Messiah's return, righteous souls inhabit olam ha'bah (oh-LAHM hah-BAH) a pleasurable place. The wicked suffer in the fires of Gehenna (geh-HEN-ah).

2. Common Misunderstandings



a. Christian Speculations

Though Jewish and Christian adherents enjoy a common history, the meanings of their shared religious vocabulary are not necessarily the same. Terms such as covenant, law, mercy, righteousness, messiah, salvation, heaven and hell may connote radically different meanings within the two traditions.

b. Jesus Jewish opinions concerning Jesus vary. Though not the Messiah, many accept him as a great teacher.

c. Subtle Anti-Semitism It is too easy for discriminatory and stereotyped language to characterize Jewish-Christian discussions. Interpretations of New Testament passages also can easily project negative images on all Jewish people.

IV. Worship

"At present [1990], synagogues have become centers of spiritual revival of the Jews. Religious schools, Hebrew language study groups, and libraries are being opened on their premises."

-- Religion in the Soviet Republics, p. 188

The following material, adapted from How to Be a Perfect Stranger (pp. 214-220) and the HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion (pp. 608-610) is instructive concerning Jewish worship practice.



Places of worship are usually called synagogues or temples. Orthodox always identify such houses of worship as synagogues; Reform practitioners usually call them temples.

1. Sanctuary Jewish prayers may occur anywhere though sacred sites, including the home or synagogue, are specifically designated. In homes, the table where families share meals and worship rituals becomes primary. Within the synagogue/temple, the entire worship space (sanctuary) is central.

a. Furnishings

(1) Bimah (BEE-mah) This raised platform is at the center or near the front of the sanctuary. The rabbi and cantor lead prayers from this area from a pulpit. A reading table serves to hold the Torah when it is opened.

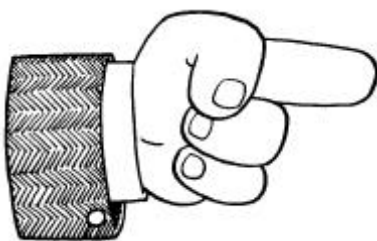
(2) Ark The Torah scroll is kept in this cabinet. The scrolls are often decorated with embroidered cloth covers.

A **parokhet** (pah-RAH-chet) or curtain covers the Ark. A lamp, symbolic of eternal light, burns continuously above and in front of the ark.

(3) Mehitsah (meh-HEET-sah) Many Orthodox Jewish congregations have this partition which separates men and women congregants. In orthodox circles where it is not present, men and women still sit separately.

b. Ritual objects

(1) Tallit (tah-LEET) In Orthodoxy, all men wear these prayer shawls. Within other circles, men and some women worshippers may cover their shoulders with this shawl.



A **kippah** (keep-AH, Hebrew for covering) or **yarmulka** (YAHR-mihl-kah, Yiddish for head covering) is required in all Orthodox, Conservative and Reconstructionist as well as some Reform congregations.

(2) Torah (TOH-rah) The scroll contains the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), handwritten in Hebrew. It rests in the Ark. A **yad** (yahd) or metal pointer serves to assist reading the Torah as the handwritten letters are not to be touched.

(3) Menorah (min-OHR-ah) This seven-branched candelabra, part of ancient Jerusalem temple furnishings, may adorn the bimah.

(4) Tefillin (teh-FILL-in) These small black leather boxes (phylacteries), held in place with straps, contain specific biblical verses. Males from the age of 13 onwards wear these on the left arm and head during weekday morning prayers.

2. Service

a. Overview Jewish worship is liturgical. The prayer book (siddur) encodes the fixed scriptures, readings and prayers for the day. Services vary according to occasion and time throughout the religious year.

(1) Minyan (MIN-yahn) A quorum of at least 10 persons over the age of 13 allows a communal prayer service to take place.



(2) Shabbat (shah-BAHT) The fullest service takes place on the Jewish Sabbath, which begins at sunset on Friday and ends Saturday nightfall.

(3) Service elements The Amidah (ah-mee-DAH) consists of praises, thanks and prayer requests to God.

The Sh'ma (shih-MAH, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One") is a declaration of faith, a central affirmation of Judaism. The Torah reading also comprises a central part of the communal prayer/worship service.

b. Leaders A rabbi directs the service, teaches and preaches. Songs and chants are led by the cantor. A specific Torah reader chants or reads from the texts for the day. A gabbai (gab-BYE) or lay person oversees the sayings of blessings for the Torah reading. Aliyah (ah-lee-YAH) a "going up," is the honor of being called forward to participate in the reading of the Torah. A congregation's president may provide introductory welcome words and announcements. In smaller congregations, one person may assume more than one of the above roles in a service.

c. Books The siddur (SEE-door) is a prayer book, which varies in content among various schools of thought. The chumash (KOOH-mahsh) contains the Torah and readings from the prophets normally associated with a given Torah reading. Called the Haftarah (hahf-TOH-rah), this reading from the prophets normally comes after the Torah portion for the day.



d. Fellowship After a service is over, a time of refreshment and reception may take place. Called a kiddush (kee-DOOSH) or oneg Shabbat (OH-neg shah-BAHT), finger foods and drinks are served. A kiddush and ha'motzi (hah-MOH-tsee) or blessings before drinking and eating are customary. A grace after meals, birkat hamazon (beer-KAHT hah-mah-ZONE), may also be commonly practiced.



"Grow a little every day."

Vocabulary List: Foundational Beliefs--Judaism

Abraham Patriarchal figure who is the father of the Jewish faith. He championed monotheism and made a special, binding covenant with God.

Canaan Another name for Palestine or the present location of Israel

Conservative Judaism Jewish school of thought which teaches that Torah is binding but new thought can also influence belief.

Covenant A binding agreement between two partners. In biblical times, the contractual agreement between God and Abraham became central to Jewish theology.

David King of Israel and Judea, author of many of the Psalms, and leader of many battles against the Canaanites

Diaspora (di-AS-pahr-ah) After the A.D. 70 Roman destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, Jewish peoples were dispersed from the land of Palestine, and forced to live outside the area of current Israel.

Exodus When the Jewish people left Egyptian captivity and headed for the Promised Land

Hagar Servant woman of Abraham by whom Abraham fathered a son, Ishmael

Hasidim (hah-SID-im) Jewish Orthodox movement established in Poland in the 18th century, where distinctive dress and language become essential elements of the faith

Holocaust (HOL-ah-kohst) Descriptive term to identify the systematic genocide of six million Jewish, plus assorted other peoples, by the Nazis between 1933-1945

Ishmael First born son of Abraham by his servant woman Hagar

Kabala (KAB-ah-lah) A branch of Jewish mysticism which interprets the Scriptures in an esoteric manner, seeking penetration of divine mysteries

Monotheism Belief in only one god

Moses Jewish leader who led the children of Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus

Orthodox Judaism Jewish law and right doctrine are the defining criteria for this most conservative trend within Judaism. Orthodoxy has a variety of schools, the modern/centrist and traditional/rightist being the most common.

Promised Land Area of present day Israel, the land the Bible says God especially designated for the Jewish peoples

Rabbi (RAB-i) Leaders, teachers and scholars of Jewish religious and community life

Reconstructionism Jewish school of thought which advocates an all encompassing "civilization" approach to faith and practice.

Reform Judaism Liberal school of Jewish practice which sees God's relationship as an ongoing process throughout history.

Sarah Abraham's wife who was unable to have a child until, in her old age, she gave birth to Isaac.

Torah The first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), being the first of three Jewish divisions of the Scriptures. It may also refer to the totality of Jewish Scriptures plus the Talmud (Jewish law and tradition).

Review Quiz: Foundational Beliefs--Judaism



Part 1--Multiple Choice Place the letter of the most correct response in the blank provided.

1. ____ The term describing the systematic death of Jewish peoples by Nazi Germany between 1933-1945 is
 - A. holocaust.
 - B. World War II.
 - C. abomination of desolation.
2. ____ Jewish intellectual and spiritual leaders, often the teachers and scholars within the community, are called
 - A. bishops.
 - B. patriarchs.
 - C. rabbis.
3. ____ The Jewish trend of thought which is at the liberal end of the theological spectrum is
 - A. Reconstructionism.
 - B. Reform Judaism.
 - C. Modern Orthodoxy.
4. ____ The ____, a traditional Orthodox practice, advocates distinct dress and language styles, in addition to having little contact with the larger, secular world.
 - A. Mishnah
 - B. Halachah
 - C. hasidim

Unit 4a: Foundational Beliefs--Judaism

5. _____ The sh'ma, "_____, " summarizes a most fundamental Jewish belief.

- A. Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is One
- B. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you
- C. Thou shalt not kill

6. _____ Reform Jewish practitioners usually call their meeting places for prayer and worship

- A. synagogues.
- B. temples.
- C. tabernacles.

7. _____ A Torah scroll is kept in a cabinet called the

- A. altar.
- B. ark.
- C. bimah.

8. _____ The seven-branched candelabra, which is a part of many sanctuary and temple furnishings, is called the

- A. menorah.
- B. fedorah.
- C. talbit.

9. _____ The Jewish Sabbath (Shabbat) takes place from

- A. dawn to dusk on Saturday.
- B. sunset Friday to Saturday nightfall.
- C. dawn Saturday to dawn Sunday.

10. _____ The idea of _____ or agreement God made with Abraham and his descendants is central to Jewish belief.

- A. fellowship
- B. ethical harmony
- C. covenant

Part 2--True/False Place a T or F in the blank provided.



1. _____ Yiddish is the primary liturgical and religious language of Judaism.
2. _____ Many Russian Jewish groups follow the Reconstructionist trend of thought.
3. _____ A distinct mystical branch of Judaism, which peaked in interest in the 1100-1300s, and experiences a revival today, is the Kabala trend of thought.
4. _____ A close community identity with Jewish peoples around the world is a foundational Jewish theological belief.
5. _____ Many Orthodox Jewish congregations advocate women and men sitting separately for prayers and synagogue services.
6. _____ The yarmulka (Yiddish for head covering) is required for worship by many Jewish congregations.
7. _____ Jewish worship has no prayer book, the Torah is used instead.
8. _____ Within Jewish and Christian traditions, definitions of commonly held religious terms can carry radically different meanings.
9. _____ In a Jewish home, the living room often becomes the primary place for saying family prayers.
10. _____ Within Jewish sanctuaries, the Torah scroll often is published from a computer software program.

Part 3--Fill in the Blanks Fill in the blanks with the most correct word from the list that follows. Not all the words listed will be used.



The patriarchal figure, the father of the Jewish faith, is (1)_____. He championed (2)_____, the belief in one God. When Abraham's wife (3)_____ seemed unable to have children, his servant woman (4)_____ bore him a son, named (5)_____.

The Jewish leader (6)_____ led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. This event, called the (7)_____, is still remembered by many Jewish peoples during Passover.

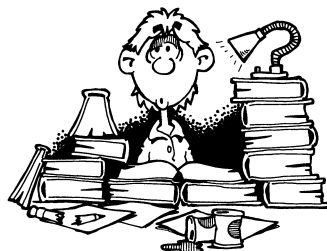
The founder of a royal dynasty, King (8)_____, wrote many poetic songs and was a great military leader.

Another name for the area of the current nation of Israel is the (9)_____ Land. In A.D. 70, the Romans devastated the Jerusalem temple, prompting the (10)_____, or dispersion of Jewish people out of Palestine.

Ishmael
Abraham
Hagar
Diaspora
HOO-AH!

Exodus
Moses
Heston
David

Monotheism
Madonna
Sarah
Promised



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"...three short rules for success--three principles...The first is to do what's right every day, legally and morally...The second principle is to create the environment where yourself and your soldiers can be all they can be...The third is a very simple rule...Treat others as we want to be treated."

General Dennis Reimer, 1998 U.S. Military Academy Graduation

